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OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES

Research and Analysis Branch

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REFERENCE DIVISION
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GERMAN MORALE AT THE END OF 1943

R & A No. 1658

Description

This report continues the general analysis of morale in R & A No. 1214 of September 16, 1943.

14 December 1943

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Summary

1. The fighting efficiency and the productive power of the German people at home and at the front show no decline.

2. Their morale continues to be bad, though it has improved somewhat under the influence of the stabilization of the fronts in Italy and Russia.

3. Their morale does, moreover, not affect their production and fighting strength because the Nazi controls have not been impaired or broken.

4. These controls have shown considerable flexibility, especially when coping with air warfare. The Nazi Party has materially contributed to the social recuperation in bombed cities.

5. Though the Army leadership is still potentially the only part of the ruling group capable of overthrowing the Nazi controls, it is unlikely to be able and willing to do so now, especially under the influence of the Moscow and Teheran conferences; otherwise, no political leadership can be expected from the industrial and middle-class leadership.

6. The terror machinery of Himmler extends to the remaining key positions in the judiciary and administration.

7. There is no large political opposition stemming from labor though potentially it still is the only group which could overthrow the regime. Our lack of a positive PW policy makes this difficult task still more difficult.

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The report Morale in Germany (R & A No. 1214) issued on September 16, 1943 assumed that "morale" in a totalitarian society acquired political significance only to the extent that the pattern of totalitarian control can be impaired or broken. It was found that this pattern of control in Germany had not been impaired or broken.

The following remarks aim at analyzing German morale early in December 1943 in the light of the methods developed in R & A No. 1214.

The following events since September 1943 may have affected German morale:

1. The retreat of the German armies in Russia and the temporary stabilization of the front;

2. Intensified air raids (Bochum, Emden, Munich, Kassel, Frankfurt a/M, Ludwigshafen, Düren, Wilhelmshaven, Wiener-Neustadt, Düsseldorf, Leverkusen, Berlin, Stuttgart, Bremen, Solingen).

3. The abduction of Mussolini and the stabilization of the Italian front.

4. The Moscow, Cairo and Teheran conferences.

5. The tightening of economic controls by Speer.

1. Morale Intelligence

Morale intelligence is far from illuminating. Neutral sources generally paint an extremely dark picture: grumbling everywhere, demoralization and disorganization as a consequence of air raids, shortages -- of manpower, desertions, political opposition -- especially in Austria. Many of these gloomy reports come from German correspondents of Swiss and Swedish papers and, if read without relation to the social and political

structure of Germany, would lead the observer to believe that Germany's collapse is imminent.

Reports dealing with political conflicts in Germany belong mostly to the realm of rumors and are, consequently, contradictory and vague. Most of these would have us believe that a "Fronde" is being organized by the German generals. This junta even has a name, the Tauroggen movement, but there is no agreement as to its leaders -- Manstein, v. Bock, Kluge, Falkenhausen, Kuechler, Keitel, Brauchitsch appear in different roles, sometimes as the leaders of the junta, sometimes as full-blooded Nazis, sometimes as political nonentities.

Other reports purport to show antagonism within the Nazi leadership: Göring figures in almost all of them as being "aloof" from the Party. Ribbentrop is said to have lost power; Bormann and the obvious Himmler appear as the real leaders.

The few available prisoner of war interrogations reveal a very contradictory picture; but the general impression is that morale on the home front is almost certainly lower than that on the fighting fronts, and that the home front is generally war-weary and has lost faith in victory.

Intercepts of correspondence between German civilians and German soldiers reveal a complete lack of interest in political and military development and an exclusive concentration on personal matters such as the fate of relatives in the war and the little joys and worries of daily life.

If we were to rely on published reports and confidential intelligence, we would indeed be compelled to believe that German morale has almost reached the bottom. If, however, we follow the performance of the German

people in the fields, factories, offices, and on the fighting fronts we can find hardly any deterioration.

This does not mean that the reports on morale are untrue or that our view of the performance in work and battle is incorrect. Most important, it does not mean that the Germans plant the morale reports that come to us from neutral countries. The two sets of statements are not contradictory, because they deal with two phenomena which, in a totalitarian society, are not necessarily related to each other.

Performance -- as R & A report No. 1214 tried to show -- is basically immune to bad morale as long as the control pattern functions.

2. Air Raids

First among the factors to be reckoned with are air raids. Air raids undoubtedly destroy Nazi controls for a certain time. Theoretically speaking, therefore, air raids could pave the way for opposition and the emergence of other forms of social control. But such a theory takes an utterly mechanistic approach to the problem. The controls to which the ordinary citizen is subject are not primarily political but technical, that is they assure the operation of society. People must live; they must, therefore, be fed, housed, have medical services, transportation, water, gas, electricity. This, in turn, requires administration. Rationing and price control must go on. Administration must go on generally, no matter whether people are Nazis, anti-Nazis, or non-Nazis. The necessities of life compel people to work not only to earn money in order to buy goods, but also to repair damage. Furthermore, in a society based on division of labor, work

can be carried on only in an integrated way.

There is today in Germany but one institution that makes things to -- that is the Nazi Party and its affiliated organizations, especially the NSV, the Nazi Welfare Organization. The more thorough the destruction by air raids, the more dependent the civilian becomes upon control by the Party.

The German control system has shown considerable adaptability to the huge problems created by air warfare. The transfer of individual plants by the Speer Ministry,[1] the establishment of Einsatzstaebe for retailers, the compelling of banks and savings institutions to honor deposits maintained with any credit institution, evacuation and temporary housing, rapid repair services which even enabled the Germans to put parts of the Hamburg harbor back into operation -- to the amazement of the Swedish sailors -- all these demonstrate the efficiency of the Nazi organizations and their increasing significance not as organs of oppression but also instruments for maintaining life. There is even a considerable amount of truth in Speer's alleged statement to his co-workers after the destruction of his Ministry during an air raid: "The more files destroyed, the less red tape." Simpler conditions of life and utter disregard for acquired rights (whether plants, shops, factories, houses, or apartments) make administration, indeed, an infinitely simple task.

Few persons possess the political intelligence to think under such circumstances, to reflect that the very institution that now makes life possible on a primitive level is responsible for the primitive character of their existence.

1. Transfer is actually ordered by the agencies where the main bulk of the order originates (i.e. the armament office of the army, the Reichsbahn, etc.) see Völkischer Beobachter (Nord) Oct. 19, 1943.

The above statements are, of course, concerned only with the so-called "morale" aspects of air warfare and not with its impact upon economic or military capabilities. The remarks do not, therefore, apply to target bombing which is a military operation. The morale effects of target bombing are thus much deeper than are those of area bombing. This explains why the Germans, even though candidly admitting and even exaggerating damage to housing, hospitals, museums, etc., never admit destruction of industrial targets.

It need also hardly be mentioned that area bombing may, of course, achieve its aim of destroying Nazi controls, if its intensity is greatly increased and if no let-up is given the Nazis. But its intermittent character facilitates the recuperation of controls. 1/

3. Military Developments

The general and often-heard statement that morale rises with victories and declines with defeat is by no means always true. Many nations have experienced boosts in morale only when actually suffering or being threatened with defeat. In the specific German circumstances, however, military defeats cannot but lower morale. There are a number of reasons for the German's position in this respect. First in importance is the Nazi military theory as it was disseminated among the people. The early Blitzkrieg accustomed the population to speedy success. The coming coordination of United Nations military activities, the defeat of the U-boats, the inferiority of the Luftwaffe, and finally the Moscow and Teheran agreements

1. This problem of the relative effects of target and area bombing will be amplified in a later report.

have deepened the feeling of military hopelessness, in which each military reversal tends to have a much stronger effect than the preceeding

As a further consequence, the barometer of morale is extremely sensitive to a favorable change in military fortunes, and what was true yesterday need no longer be true today. Seen in this light, the lack of United Nations progress in Italy and the temporary stabilization of the Eastern front have definitely improved morale -- to a much greater degree than these Nazi military successes deserve. Even the loss of Italy will not lower morale greatly, since Italy is considered merely a Vorfeld. The situation is different with regard to the Eastern front: a further break in the front, compelling withdrawal to, let us say, the Rumanian frontier, would almost certainly become the most important single factor in morale while an Allied invasion elsewhere, especially in Western Europe, if it meets with initial success, would seriously undermine morale -- if not disrupt the Nazi controls. 1/

4. Economic Conditions and Morale

a) It is clear that, in spite of the monotony of the diet, food is still adequate and, in some cases, better than during the last period 1918. 2/ But there is serious doubt that inadequate food materially contributed to the collapse of Germany in 1918. It probably was not lack of food, but its unequal distribution, especially in the Army and Navy, which brought about the defeat of Germany. There is no doubt, however, that the Nazis

1. See "Patterns of Collapse" in NY Weekly
2. OSS R & A No. 1091, Oct. 1943.

have learned the lesson of 1918 and are rigidly enforcing their egalitarian treatment, giving special preference to soldiers and heavy workers. This cause for bad moral is, therefore, absent. There are, of course, rumors about preferential treatment, which no doubt are often based on fact. But these cases must not be exaggerated and are almost sure to be taken care of by Himmler wherever they create too much talk.

b) A second general problem is presented by inflation and black market. 1/ Economically, inflationary potentialities exist. But the economic controls, together with the egalitarian treatment of all the people, have inflationary tendencies wholly in hand. There is, also, no black market powerful enough to disrupt the controls which have shown remarkable flexibility. Let us take the example of barter trade. It was held -- under the impact of the 1923 inflation -- that barter is inflationary because it manifests the Flucht ausder Mark -- the flight from the Reichsmark, as it was then called -- and thus increases the velocity of circulation of the currency. It is for this reason that Funk originally attacked barter trade. But local Nazi organizations continued to organize barter centers under popular pressure and the government finally gave in. It organized centers, appointed experts for the determination of the exchange value of the bartered goods, and thus incorporated barter into its economic and political system. A movement that at first seemed to threaten disorganization, has actually become another element of the regime's strength.

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1. A special report on Inflation is under way.

5. Political Friction

The Nazi system has never rested upon spontaneous political support. It drew its psychological strength from the utter collapse of the Weimar party system and utilized this collapse by devising a system of mass domination which would preclude the articulation of an opposition.

a) The characteristic of the Nazi "constitution" is its very shapelessness,[1] namely the absence of institutions like the Grand Council of Fascism where Mussolini was actually deposed, and like the Monarchy which made it possible to engineer the deposition. No one can put his finger on any specific German institution, except that of the Führer, and say that all political power is concentrated there. It resides everywhere and is carefully divided between and within the Party, the army, industry, and high civil servants; it can be and is constantly being shifted in an utterly informal way without any institutionalized machinery being put in operation. Since there is no such supreme institution except the Führer, control by an opposing faction can come about only by the elimination of the Führer.

b) This is especially true of the armed forces, weakened psychologically by the unconditional surrender formula and the Moscow and Teheran conferences which allow neither the Eastern nor the Western orientation in the high command to assume political leadership. There has been a heavy inroad of reliable Nazis into key military positions -- a particularly good example being the appointment of General Guenter Korten as chief of staff of the GAF. To this must be added the steady influx of Nazi indoctrinated officers taken from the Hitler Youth where they have received thorough pre-military training.

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1. OSS report R & A ., 1082 Aug. 10, 1945.

Still, potentially, it is the army leadership where opposition may ultimately crystallize if the fortunes of war decline still further.

c) Industry is now under the leadership of its technicians and engineers who, for this reason, are of course no less capitalistic than the financiers and administrators. For then, the situation would appear quite hopeless. But it is even more hopeless to expect opposition to be organized by them. The Speer organization, the Armament Ministry itself, the Hauptausschüsse and Industrieringe, Labor Supply Engineers, Transport, Power, and Building Deputies, etc. have drawn industry tighter into the system of Nazi economic controls than any pervious control system. Moreover, industry is permeated with Nazi business men of the type of Pleiger, Voss, Kohrl, Schieber, Hayler, Zangen, and is divided between non-political and Nazi business men. In addition, German industry, after the death of its two main representatives, Hugo Stinnes and Walther Rathenau, never played a decisive political role in the open. The influence of men like Krupp, Bosch, Duisberg, Schnitt, Flick, Kloeckner was clandestine. Lack of courage and of political intelligence made open political activity impossible. Industry will follow where more powerful forces lead -- it will almost certainly follow the army leadership to which it is tied by common tradition family ties and finance.

d) Slowly and steadily, key positions in the judicial and administrative leadership are being filled by reliable Nazis. This policy of Himmler may not be spectacular, but is none the less effective and important. These replacements may even be popular because Himmler was careful to select from among the Nazi candidates those who have served in this

war and have been wounded. 1/ In this way, care is taken to prevent the articulation of opposition among the traditional conversative groups. It must be expected that this policy will be continued.

e) The middle class can safely be eliminated from consideration as a political factor. It has never, since 1812, demonstrated either political wisdom or courage. Its ranks are, besides, split into those groups who benefit from the regime, either as farmers, businessmen, and party officials, and civil servants, and those who have descended into the proletariat, where they either merge with the working class (undoubtedly few), or keep aloof from it hoping again for independence which some outside power alone can give them.

f) It is the Working Classes which is and will continue to be crucial. Our information is certainly scanty. But the absence of adequate intelligence indicates the utter lack of large-scale opposition, which could not be concealed for any length of time. The German worker is a realist. He will oppose if and when the controls are seriously impaired but he is unlikely to contribute anything to the destruction of the controls. The contribution of organized and even revolutionary labor to the collapse in 1918 was small as compared with the abandonment of power by the Monarchy and Ludendorff. Labor appeared as a political power in 1918 after the German Army had abandoned resistance but it had done little to undermine that resistance.

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1. i.e. President of the Court of Appeal Nuremberg - Dr. Ernest Lehmert
President of the Court of Appeal Cologne - Dr. Erich Lawall
President of the Court of Appeal Linz - Dr. Pollan
See also OSS #28857, Dec. 11, 1943 on policy of Himmler in regard to municipal administration.

It is not likely to be different this time, although the picture has changed in two ways. The lack of organization makes political activity almost impossible. But the mere fact that the Nazi system is responsible for war and misery and that labor by tradition and status is the only group likely to act -- though at a late period -- has probably overcome the political isolation of labor and thus promises for the future a much larger influence.

It is here, however, that lack of a positive PW policy by the Allied powers proves to be the greatest single obstacle to the utilization of the oppositional potentialities of labor -- it is unnecessary to repeat statements previously made.

6. Morale of the Troops

The salient fact about morale among the troops is that the German army is offering terrific resistance in the East and in Italy, and has slowed down the combined might of Britain and the United States to about one mile a day. Small detachments are reported to be holding strong points as the main body of the army withdraws. Second class, defensive divisions fight shoulder to shoulder with crack units and acquit themselves admirably. We conclude that the morale of the front line troops is good.

The question remains -- how long will they hold firm? It is assumed that morale will slowly deteriorate as the result of defeats on all fronts, intensified bombing of German cities, and Allied propaganda. It is impossible, however, to trace its decline with any degree of accuracy because of three factors. 1) In addition to the general downward trend,

there are fluctuations which appear to be related to the immediate tactical situation. This point is illustrated in P/W reports which show lower morale on the part of troops taken in Sicily where the Germans were beaten in a running fight than among those taken during the first two weeks in Italy where the front was well defended. 2) The German army contains a large number of malcontents. It is estimated that there are almost one million "Racial Germans" and foreigners in its ranks, many of whom have no interest in the war. To these must be added the political opponents of the Nazis and "poor soldiers" who appear in any army. As a result, any agent within enemy lines can find enough of these malcontents to justify reporting a good deal of data on desertions, acts of sabotage, and treasonable talk. Hence this type of information must be treated with great caution in estimating changes in the situation. 3) Reports based on P/W interrogations are, perhaps, the most reliable source of information which is available to us. Even these, however, are suspect because a man experiences a drop in morale as the result of being taken prisoner.

The materials which have come to our attention justify the following generalizations:

1) Morale among troops in occupied territories tends to be lower than that of front-line troops.

2) Conditions in Russia place a heavy strain on the German soldier. It is possible that the first real break in morale (mass insubordination) will occur in this area as the result of severe tactical setbacks.

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Nazi Party, Germany 1.22

PP+J, Germany 1.22

Morale, Germany 6.19

Air raids, Germ. 5.1.1

Army, Germ 3.11

Ind., " 0.1.5